



Vietnam Veterans of America

8605 Cameron Street, Suite 400 • Silver Spring, MD 20910 • Telephone (301) 585-4000

Main Fax (301) 585-0519 • Advocacy (301) 585-3180 • Communications (301) 585-5245 • Finance (301) 585-5542

World Wide Web: <http://www.vva.org>

A Not-For-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

January 7, 2005

The Honorable Jo Anne B. Barnhart
Commissioner of Social Security
P. O. Box 17703
Baltimore, Maryland 21235-7703

Dear Commissioner Barnhart,

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) believes that the proposed revisions of the medical evaluation criteria for chronic liver disease will succeed in doing a disservice to veterans afflicted with this deadly disease.

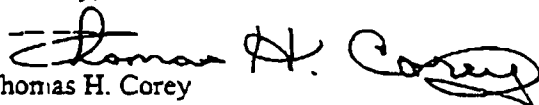
Thousands of Vietnam veterans are diagnosed with hepatitis C. Tens of thousands more do not know that this virus lurks within them, and may never know unless and until the disease causes irreversible damage to their liver. We know many veterans whose lives are consumed just coping with the ravages of hepatitis C, once it manifests in such diseases as cirrhosis or cancer of the liver.

Any evaluation criteria adopted by your Administration for chronic liver disease must, we believe, directly and specifically address hepatitis C. They also must take into account how an individual lives with this disease, how debilitating the disease is in impacting an individual's ability to earn a living, and how (s)he responds (or does not respond) to treatment. Too many veterans who are living marginal lives at best and who are coping with hepatitis C simply cannot undergo the rigors of long-term treatment therapy even if this is a potentially life-saving or life-enhancing option. Other veterans are rendered totally unable to work because of the side effects of the pharmacological treatments.

Although we understand the need for parameters, it is our hope that the Social Security Administration will not adopt regulations that are based solely on histological findings from a liver biopsy, but rather that they reflect the progressive effects of chronic liver disease – and specifically hepatitis C – on an individual's life. As one example, we know of veterans who cannot withstand a liver biopsy because of scar tissue and bone fusion from wounds received in battle. In light of all of the above, and other relevant medical factors, any evaluation criteria must be broad enough to take into account the overall health, well being, and ability to sustain gainful work on the part of the affected individual.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments. VVA hopes your experts will give serious consideration to our comments.

Sincerely,


Thomas H. Corey
National President